

Bulpitt Drapers of Southsea

by Alison Carter MA FMA, freelance dress historian

Joseph Wilberforce Reeve Bulpitt (1835-1913) established his company Bulpitt Drapers of Southsea in the 1870s. He was born in Marylebone, Middlesex in 1835 and was the son of John Bulpitt who was a linen draper.

According to the 1851 census, J W R Bulpitt was a Draper's Apprentice, in the Parish of St George Bloomsbury, to William Paddy, draper with six employees. By 1861 he is living in Worthing and working as Draper's Assistant to John Rayner, linen draper and hosier, and lodging with his boss. By the time of the next census in 1871 Joseph is listed as a Draper's Assistant in Portsea Island so had moved to this area. He obviously took over the business because in the 1881 census he is listed as a Linen Draper, living at 2 The Retreat.

Joseph Bulpitt had several daughters and two sons, Harry Reeve Bulpitt 1873-1946 and John (Jack) Reeve Bulpitt 1881-1962. Harry and Jack took over the family business on Joseph's death in 1913. Joseph left £24,000 in his will so the business was obviously thriving at this time.

This information has been gathered from the 1841-1911 census returns and the 1939 register, and births, marriages and deaths.

The Edwardian wedding dress on pages 6 and 7 was made by Bulpitt Drapers of Southsea. It is a treasure worth preserving and conservationist Sarah Howard explains how she dealt with the fabric's problems.